THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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NDA sitting pretty

SEATS 243

TARGET 122

Source	NDA	MGB	JSP	OTH
Chanakya Strategies	130-138	100-108	0-0	3-5
Dainik Bhaskar	145-160	73-91	0-3	5-7
DV Research	137-152	83-98	2-4	1-8
JVC	135-150	88-103	0-1	3-6
Matrize	147-167	70-90	0-2	2-8
P-Marq	142-162	80-98	1-4	0-3
Peoples Insight	133-148	87-102	0-2	3-6
TIF Research	145-163	76-95	0	3-6
Peoples Pulse	133-159	75-101	0-5	2-8
POLL OF POLLS	148	90	1	5

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Polls suggest exit of Oppn aspirations

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

AS the high-stakes Bihar assembly election came to a close on Tuesday, pollsters were unanimous in predicting the National Democratic Alliance's return to power with a convincing majority. If the predictions stand, it will be a huge setback for the Opposition's Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance), which was trying to win the politically crucial state after a gap of 20 years.

The poll of exit polls projected the NDA comprising Janata Dal United JD (U), the BJP, and the LJP(RV) will cross the majority mark by securing 148 seats, giving the RJD-led grand alliance just 88 seats, less than the 110 seats it won in the 2020 election. The majority mark for the 243-seat assembly is 122.

Election strategist Prashant Kishore's Jan Suraaj Party, which was hyped to play a crucial role in this election, may end up with a poor showing, as per exit polls.

The Bihar polls were conducted in two phases on November 6 and 11, and the results will be out on November 14. The results will also set the tone for the upcoming assembly elections in Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu next year as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls has already begun in these states.

Bihar is the first state to go to polls after the SIR exercise.

Exit poll projections are made by election survey agencies based on interviews of voters as they come out after casting their votes. These may vary from the actual results. P12

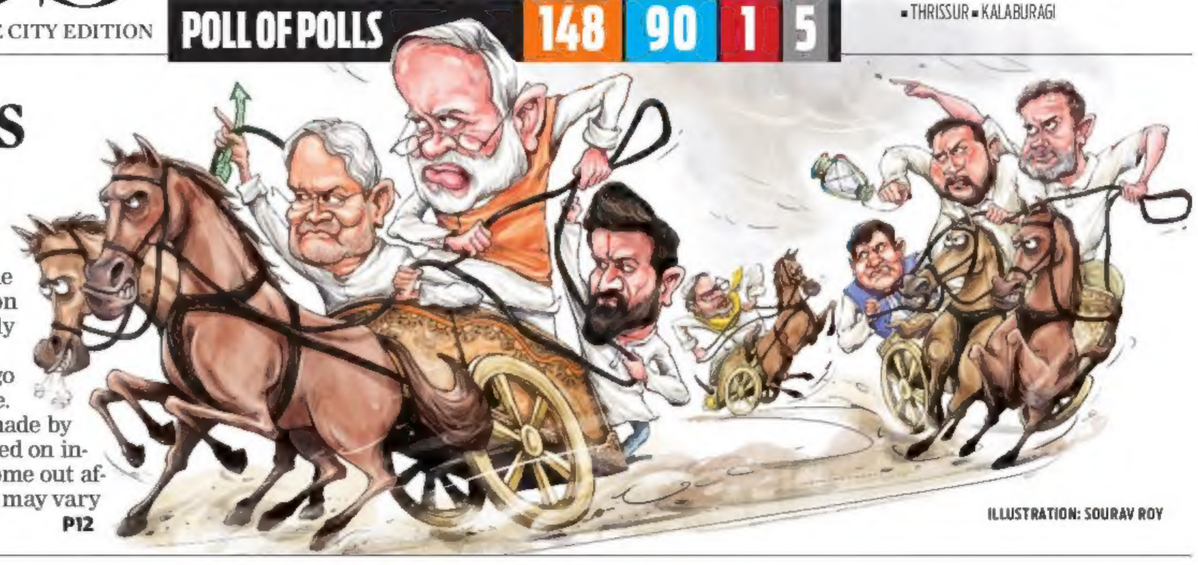


ILLUSTRATION: SOURAV ROY

Trump says levy cut soon; India waits for US word

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

A day after US President Donald Trump said that Washington is 'pretty close' to signing a trade deal with India, which would also pave the way for lowering tariffs on Indian goods, sources in Delhi said the trade talks have been so comprehensive that another round of negotiations may not be necessary.

Commerce ministry officials said New Delhi is awaiting a response from Washington on the bilateral trade agreement talks. "They (US) have to get back to us. India's negotiations have been the most comprehensive and WTO-compliant as compared to any other country. Negotiations have been done cautiously and carefully, keeping the sensitive sectors in mind."

US President Donald Trump

The ministry's update came a day after Trump said the deal would soon be sealed, which would enhance the bilateral relations, boost US energy exports and promote investments in key US sectors.

According to US media reports, Trump also signalled that the tariffs on Indian goods would be lowered. "The tariffs on India are really high because of the Russian oil [imports], but they have now substantially reduced Russian oil [imports], so we will be bringing the tariffs down," Trump was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said that while India wants a fair trade deal with the US, it won't compromise on the interests of farmers and the dairy sector.

• Intercepted letter from Nowgam proves key link • Suspects may be 'linked' to Faridabad terror module: • Jaish hand evident, say officials

Blast probe handed over to NIA

MUKESH RANJAN, FAYAZ WANI & NAMITA BAJPAI
@ New Delhi/Srinagar/Lucknow

THE investigation into the deadly car blast near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10 that killed 12 people was on Tuesday formally handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), following high-level security meetings chaired by home minister Amit Shah.

Security agencies, working in coordination with state police across J&K, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, launched extensive search operations on Tuesday and found multiple leads linked to the banned Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror outfit.

Preliminary investigations revealed incriminating JeM internal communications that suggest 'revenge' as the motive for internal disloyalty. An intercepted letter recovered in J&K's Nowgam, believed to have originated from the Pakistan-based outfit, threatens punishment for 'betrayals' within JeM, exhibiting rhetoric consistent with earlier internal directives.

Senior intelligence officials suggest that factional pressure and infighting within JeM could have precipitated the Delhi blast, following counter-insurgency activity in Kashmir.

PHOTO: PTI

Charred remains of vehicles on Tuesday, following the deadly blast near Red Fort Metro Station the previous night that killed 12 people in New Delhi.(Right) A forensic official collects samples from the site a day after the explosion | SHEKHAR YADAV

The police registered a case headlined 'bomb blast' invoking sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Explosive Substances Act, after forensics teams began analysing specimens from the site and vehicle to match those from the deceased.

Investigators are scrutinising CCTV footage and digital devices and matching DNA samples to ascertain the identity of the car's occupants. Early findings indicate the use of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil as the explosive material, and a possible operational link to the Faridabad module, from which 350 kg of explosives and a cache of weapons were seized.

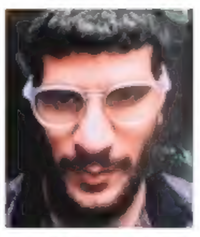
Several individuals associated with the accused doctors from Kashmir, notably Dr Umar Nabi and Dr Muzammil Ganaie and Dr Adeel Ahmed, have been detained for questioning in coordinated raids in Pulwama, Srinagar, Faridabad, and parts of western Uttar Pradesh. In UP, ATS teams carried out raids in Saharanpur, Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar, detaining individuals connected to the JeM module.

In Srinagar, at least eight persons including father, mother and two brothers of Dr Umar Nabi, who is suspected of driving the car that exploded,were detained. Security has been ramped up at sensitive locations, including Ayodhya.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, currently in Thimpu on an official visit, said: "The conspirators will not be spared."

India hit out at Pakistan for attempting to link New Delhi to the terrorist attack in Islamabad on Tuesday, calling the charge "baseless, unfounded, and a predictable tactic." Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif alleged India's role in a suicide bombing that killed 12 people in Islamabad. P11

Umar Mohammad Nabi, Pulwama doctor in the middle of the 'car bomb'



Umar Mohammad Nabi

CAR TRACK

- Umar's i20 first spotted outside Asian hospital in Faridabad around 7.30 am on Monday
- Car entered Delhi after crossing the Badarpur toll plaza at 8.13 am
- Seen near a petrol pump in the Okhla Industrial Area at 8.20 am
- At 3.19 pm, car entered parking lot near the Red Fort complex, stayed there for 3 hrs
- Exited at 6.22 pm, drove toward Red Fort; blast at 6.52 pm

NITIN RAWAT @ New Delhi

A day after the Red Fort blast, which killed 12 people and injured more than 20, investigators are focusing on Umar Mohammad Nabi, a Pulwama-born medical professional suspected to have been behind the wheel of the white Hyundai i20 that exploded near Gate No. 1 of the Lal Qila Metro Station.

According to officials familiar with the probe, Umar is suspected to have links with the radicalised white-collar module busted in Faridabad, in a joint operation by the J&K Police and Haryana's Special Task Force. The operation led to the arrest of eight individuals, including three doctors, and the seizure of 2,900 kg of explosive-making material from multiple locations in Haryana.

Umar, a resident of Koil village in Pulwama, was allegedly in touch with members of the same Faridabad module, according to sources. CCTV footage shows a man with a mask at the wheel of the car before the blast.

Tracing the ownership of the i20 provided the breakthrough that led investigators to the Faridabad module. The car was initially registered in the name of Salman. He sold it to Devender, who later sold it to Taariq, based in Pulwama. While tracking Taariq, investigators found the white i20 was with Nabi.

The police said specialised teams, including crime units, are collecting forensic evidence from the site. Raids have been carried out across the National Capital Region, with security checks in Daryaganj, Paharganj, railway stations, airports, and bus terminals. Investigators said the Pulwama-Faridabad connection is the key line of inquiry.

Ground-breaking for 1st tunnel road likely in Feb

MOHAMMED YACOOB @ Bengaluru

AFTER three failed attempts to find a prospective bidder for the multi-crore tunnel road project, the Bengaluru Smart Infrastructure Ltd (B-Smile) on Tuesday said the fourth round of bidding has ended on a 'positive' note with big agencies submitting their bids for the project.

Sources from the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) said that big companies like Adani, Tata Group and others have submitted their bids. If all goes according to plan, the ground-breaking ceremony of the project, which is facing criticism from various quarters, will be held in February.

For the Rs 18,000 crore corridor from Esteem Mall near Hebbal in Bengaluru North and Silk Board in Bengaluru South, companies submitted bids online on Tuesday, the last day of bidding. They will hand over hard copies in sealed covers within 24 hours (by Wednesday), which will be opened before a committee.

Fifteen days from Thursday (November 13), qualified bidders will be announced. Later, B-Smile will choose the best bidder after evaluating their technical bids. "After the technical bid qualification, there will be a financial bid, and by December 10, the agencies making the lowest bid will be announced. By January first week, the state government will award the tenders by entering into an agreement with the selected agency. The ground-breaking ceremony for the north-south tunnel is likely in February 2026," said a top B-Smile official.

"Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar will announce the agency selected for the project," he added. P2

After apex court order, Malur seat votes recounted

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolar

IN the first-ever recounting of votes in the country after EVMs were introduced, the process for the Malur Assembly constituency went off peacefully on Tuesday.

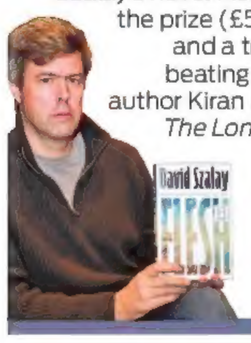
The recounting, held as per the directions of the Supreme Court, was held at the Horticulture College in Kolar. It began at 8 am in the presence of candidates and their agents, and concluded at 9 pm. Only senior officials and the counting staff were allowed. Sitting MLA KY Nanjegowda, former legislator KS Manjunath Gowda and Hoodi Vijayakumar were present.

The results will be presented to the SC in a sealed cover. In the 2023 Assembly polls, Nanje Gowda won with a margin of 248 votes. Defeated BJP candidate Manjunath Gowda approached the High Court, which ordered a recount, disqualified Nanje Gowda's election and granted a four-week stay. Nanje Gowda appealed the verdict before the Supreme Court, which directed re-counting of votes and the process was taken up by the Election Commission of India on Tuesday.

BOOKER PRIZE

TO HUNGARIAN-BRITISH AUTHOR DAVID SZALAY

Szalay's novel *Flesh* won the prize (£50,000 and a trophy), beating Indian author Kiran Desai's *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* | P14



New tech makes state websites less prone to attacks

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

GOVERNMENT department portals in the state have become safer and less prone to hackers by adopting and upgrading to the Content Management System - 4 (CMS v4.0). Upgrading of over 1,200 existing government portals has been taken up by the Centre for e-Governance Department. The web portal wing of the Centre for e-Governance comes under the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR e-Governance).

The state has over 72 major departments in Karnataka, and each department has a separate web portal with many websites under it. At present, around 600 portals have been upgraded, while the remaining are in different stages of upgrading. Officials from the e-Governance department said it will take some time to cover all the 1,200 portals under the CMS v4.0 version, which is the latest. They are ensuring a smooth migration from the existing version to the upgraded one, while also training the staff who are maintaining the websites and portals, sources said.

The new version has multiple layers of safety measures and features and is less prone to virus attacks, the sources said. "Along with an OTP-verified system, we also have QR code verification, making it difficult for hackers to target our websites," an official said.

There have been instances of government portals being hacked in the past. Earlier this year, the Kaveri 2.0 application, managed by the Karnataka Stamps and Registration Department, saw a cyber attack, impacting property registration, document services and citizen services like downloading of encumbrance certificates (ECs). Every year, an average of 50-60 state and Union government websites are hacked across the country. CONTINUED ON P4

> Along with an OTP-verified system, we also have QR code verification, making it difficult for hackers to target our websites
> - An official

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